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**Improvements to Florida's Unemployment Compensation System Report Out  
of House Business and Consumer Affairs Subcommittee**

*Changes improve upon last year's unemployment compensation reforms*

**Tallahassee, Fla.** – As leaders continue to focus on ensuring Florida has one of the most business-friendly climates in the nation, the House Business and Consumer Affairs Subcommittee Tuesday passed crucial reforms that seek to improve Florida's unemployment compensation system and promote job readiness among Floridians looking for work.

“During the 2011 Legislative Session, we took steps to move Florida's Unemployment Compensation system in the direction of a ‘re-employment system,’ one that provides fairness and consistency for both an employer and employee,” said House Business and Consumer Affairs Subcommittee Chairman Doug Holder (R-Sarasota). “Our goal was to reduce the tax burden on businesses, which helps those businesses retain jobs, so more people aren't added to the unemployment system. Additionally, lower taxes and a more stable and consistent system increases employer confidence in our tax structure, which we believe will ultimately lead to job creation.”

“The changes our subcommittee approved today will build upon the efforts we began last year and address some of the shortcomings we have experienced over the past several months,” continued Chairman Holder. “Ensuring Floridians have the job skills necessary to compete in today's global economy is a critical part of helping to turn Florida's economy around.”

The subcommittee passed PBC CAS 12-02, which improves on issues addressed by last year's legislation and helps to further enhance Florida's unemployment compensation system. In order to focus more on reemployment, the PCB renames the existing Unemployment Compensation Program as the “Reemployment Assistance Program.” The proposal provides that appropriate training be offered, at no cost, to individuals who score below the minimum proficiency level on the initial skills review. This allows the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), workforce boards and one-stop career centers to prioritize individuals for training who are most in need of this re-employment service. The bill also reduces the weekly work search requirements from five to three, for small counties with a population of 75,000 or fewer, due to limitations related to the number of businesses and one-stop career centers that are accessible to these claimants.

As part of improvements made to the unemployment compensation system's initial skills test, the bill:

- Requires the DEO to establish a numeric score on the initial skills review which demonstrates a minimum proficiency in workforce skills.

- Provides a claimant with the option to undergo workforce skills training if he or she scores below this standard.
- Stipulates that workforce skills training will be provided at no cost to the individual and will focus on improving the claimant's minimum proficiency test score.

To improve the state unemployment compensation program's efficiency, the bill:

- Reduces number of weekly employer contacts from five to three for individuals who reside in small counties with a [population of 75,000 or less].
- Clarifies that a disqualification for making a fraudulent claim begins when the fraudulent claim was made. Further, this disqualification may continue up to one year from the date DEO discovers the fraudulent claim and until any fraudulent overpayments are repaid in full.
- Amends the statute of limitations related to the collection of overpayments by providing that the commencement of collections must be initiated within 7 years after the redetermination or decision.
- Authorizes the DEO to noncharge the accounts of employers who are forced to lay off workers due to a man-made disaster of national significance such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

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